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ABSTRACT

The nature and scope of eighteenth century rhetoric were defined by three dominant taxonomies of knowledge. In the oldest taxonomy, which clung to the liberal arts tradition, rhetoric was seen as a means of achieving social dominance, and its distinctive characteristic was the exercise of control through persuasion. Treatises representing this point of view comprehensively reviewed the accumulated lore of rhetorical devices in search of persuasive devices. The second ordering of knowledge followed a Baconian structure and reflected the division of mental faculties employed in generating, recording, and transmitting knowledge. Within this structure, rhetoric was seen as the art of adornment within the broader organ of transmission. The works of many theorists show how this conception led to an emphasis on vivid description and imagery and to an expansion of the scope of rhetoric to include nonpersuasive discourse. In the final pattern, eloquence was defined as a fine art and rhetoric was associated with a number of plastic arts. Theorists from this school agreed that the essential characteristic of the fine arts, and of rhetoric, was the expression of ideas. In practical treatises on rhetoric, the emphasis on expression was associated with a declining interest in the instrumentality of rhetorical discourse and in a growth of interest in delivery and the "elocutionary movement." (GT)

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SHIFTING CONCEPTIONS OF RHETORIC IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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Surveying the content of rhetoric in any period is a demanding assignment, and the eighteenth century is no exception. However, the task is eased considerably by the number of reliable guides available. These include Vincent Bevilacqua, Douglas Ehninger, Wilbur Samuel Howell, and several other scholars. Saying more to acknowledge my debts is unnecessary because my benefactors are well known. My account of eighteenth-century rhetoric differs from theirs in one particular: the emphasis I place on efforts of Enlightenment theorists to integrate rhetoric within the broader corpus of knowledge. For these rhetoricians, and the whole of the eighteenth-century intellectual community, the leading challenge of the age resulted from the need to find an ordering of knowledge which preserved the acquisitions of past generations while clearing space for the products of the new science. Responses to this challenge took many forms, but the characteristic ploy paralleled Ramus' attempt to introduce order and symmetry into the scholastic curriculum of the sixteenth century. Just as Ramus had sought to produce a more orderly body of knowledge by confining each art within orderly bounds, theorists of our period produced eloborate generic schemes outlining the boundaries of nearly allied arts. These schemes are ornately printed at the head of many encyclopedic works of the era, and even theorists who did not reproduce their schemes in print were nevertheless committed to them. It is in reference to these products of

this sort that D'Alembert calls the Enlightenment the AGE OF SYSTEMS.

In spite of numerous cross-currents and eddies, the widely accepted orderings of knowledge employed by eighteenth-century theorists tended to cluster around three salient points reflecting the fundamental principles ordering the systems. The oldest taxonomy clung to the liberal arts tradition and reflected a sociological principle dividing knowledge into components suitable for free men who would govern the community and carefully distinguishing such liberalizing studies from the mechanical arts reserved for lesser men. The dominant pattern for much of the century followed a Baconian structure and reflected the division of mental faculties employed in generating, recording, and transmitting knowledge. The final pattern adopted the Cartesian distinction between mind and body, and classified the several arts according to the ontological status of their objects. In what follows, I shall briefly describe each of these taxonomies, but the bulk of my attention is devoted to the nature and scope of rhetoric as it is defined in each of these systems.

1.0 THE LIBERAL ARTS PATTERN

Of the taxonomies of knowledge with which we are concerned, the oldest is the liberal arts tradition. Formulated by Varro in the first century BC, this pattern

became the ordering notion of the scholastic curriculum and persisted well into the eighteenth century. As a liberal art, rhetoric was seen to be a means of achieving social dominance--a characteristic it shared with Grammar, Logic, Music, Arithmatic, Geometry, and Astronomy. Most of these arts could be separated from one another by their subject matter, but the fact that Logic, Grammar, and Rhetoric--often clustered together as the trivium--dealt with words made further differentiation necessary. Although it was half a century old at the start of our period, Thomas Wilson's metered verse both summarized the tradition and provided the foundation for kindred theorists of our period. He explained:

> Grammar dothe teache to utter wordes,
> To speak bothe arte and playne,
> Logique by art settes furth the truth,
> and doth tel us what is vayne.
> Rhetorique at large paintes well the cause
> And makes that seme right gay,
> Which Logique spake but at a worde,
> And taught as by the way.
>
> [cited in Howell]

Of course, that which Logic taught merely 'by the way' is the adaptation of discourse to a popular audience, and Rhetoric was contrasted to Logic as the open hand to the closed fist. Thus the distinctive characteristic of rhetoric was the exercise of control through persuasion.

Lawson, for example, aptly characterized rhetoric by saying that its business is to prepare an orator "for the Battle, to furnish him with Arms of Proof, [and] to teach him the Use of them." (Page 51) In other words, the devices of rhetoric were seen to be means of securing popular acceptance and most theorists of this school limited rhetorical discourse to forms producing persuasion. Lord Monbodo summarized the extreme version of this tradition in the claim that whenever an orator goes beyond persuasion, "he goes out of the province of rhetoric." (VI, 11) Other theorists adopted less extreme positions, but persuasion remained their central concern. Instance Fenelon's willingness to admit efforts to please, portray, and strike into the corpus of rhetoric so long as they were subordinate to the central purpose of persuasion. Similarly, Shaftesbury found historical confirmation of the subordinate role of other objectives in the fact that "where chief men and leaders had the strongest interest to persuade, they used the highest endeavours to please." (Characteristics, I, 154) Note also Ward's definition that "Oratory is the art of speaking well on any subject in order to persuade." (cited in Howell, p. 59)

Theorists of this school literally sought to identify all of the available means of persuasion, and treatises of this ilk were among the most comprehensive as they reviewed the accumulated lore of rhetorical devices in search of persuasive devices. In fact, it is the very

comprehensiveness of these treatises that has earned the school they represented the appelation 'degenerate classicism.' [Ehninger] I don't share the condemnation implied in the title, but it is clear that theorists of this school were the least responsive to contemporary speculative developments and that they were the most heavily committed to simple restatements of classical precept. In common, they included all of the classical officia except memory, classified speeches according to the situations in which they were presented, recommended use of artificial systems of invention, and viewed ethos, pathos, and logos as autonomous means of persuasion.

Substantial treatises representing this point of view were not published until relatively late in our period: John Lawson's Lectures Concerning Oratory in 1752, John Ward's System Of Oratory in 1759, and Joseph Priestley's Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism in 1777. This fact is deceptive, however, because these treatises more nearly represent the culmination of the tradition than its inception. The lectures on which these treatises were based had been presented many years prior to their publication and constitute only one source of the classical tradition. Other spokesmen for the liberal arts view of rhetoric include a host of treatises composed during the seventeenth century which found continued popularity in the eighteenth, translations of continental works, and reissues of classical works. Perhaps the most wisely used seventeenth-century

treatise was Thomas Farnaby's Index Rhetoricus, and translations of Bernard Lami's Art of Speaking with its accompanying discourse on persuasion proved extremely popular. Widely circulated classical treatises include Quintilian's Institutes, reprinted five times in the first six decades of the century, and Cicero's De Oratory which was released twelve times in the same period. In addition, the Ad Herennium was printed twice and Aristotle's Rhetoric three times during the first half of the century.

Because rhetorics of this school sought to identify all of the available means of persuasion, they were the most comprehensive in covering the materials of rhetoric. Subsequent theorists drew from them, but were much more selective in using the materials derived from the classical tradition.

2.0 BACONIAN PLAN

The second ordering of knowledge which affected rhetoric during the eighteenth century was derived from Francis Bacon's efforts to describe the universe of knowledge. Bacon, it should be recalled, divided knowledge according to the mental faculties which exercised sway over its application, and recognized four intellectual arts: invention, judgment, memory, and elocution or tradition. The fourth is further divided into the organ of discourse meaning language and symbols, the method of discourse including the forming, arranging, and managing a composition as a whole, and the illustration of discourse--the last of which alone Bacon associates with the term "rhetoric." Of the classical officia, Bacon's taxonomy leaves only a portion of elocution within the realm of rhetoric. That is, he sees rhetoric as the art of adornment within the broader organ of transmission and passes the arts of invention and disposition to the domain of logic.

Of course, Bacon did not think that effective discourse depended on style alone, and Karl Wallace has amply demonstrated the fact that Bacon entertained a complete theory of discourse distributed under several heads. However, the fact that one must search elsewhere in the Baconian scheme for precepts governing invention and disposition points to a substantial reduction in the content of rhetoric. Moreover, Bacon's taxonomy was applied by a

number of subsequent theorists who were less concerned with the integrity of the art than with the coherence of the system. These subsequent theorists include many of the encyclopedists of the era and an imposing list of Scottish rhetoricians.

Of the former group, the most influential was Ephriam Chambers, whose Cyclopaedia: or an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences (1728) set the standard for several generations of encyclopedic works. Chambers began with a formal division of the world of knowledge following Baconian lines, but divided knowledge of human activities into internal arts such as logic and external arts. The external arts deal either with real objects as in chemistry or with symbolic objects. Symbolic objects include words, the object of grammar; armories, the object of heraldry; fables, the object of poetry; and tropes and figures, the object of rhetoric. [cited from the 3rd edition; Dublin: Richard Gunne, et al, 1740, I, iii.]

Encyclopedias were increasingly popular during the eighteenth century, and Chamber's work was in its third edition within twelve years. Composing the "Preliminary Discourse" to the grand Encyclopedia, D'Alembert borrowed liberally from Chambers and D'Alembert's version was itself plagarized by Temple Henry Croker in his "Preface" to Ibe Complete Dictionary of Arts and Sciences (1764). These bits of historical trivia earn a place here largely as a means of

indicating the extent to which Baconian speculation affected the intellectual climate of our era. Better known exponents of the Baconian scheme include Alexander Gerard, James Beattie, and George Jardine who followed Bacon in making Rhetoric the fourth and final division of Logic. Gerard, for example, assigned to rhetoric the consideration of "everything which relates to the nature and use of those signs by which we communicate our sentiments to one another." [cited in Irvine, 105] In fact, Gerard revised the plan of education at Aberdeen at mid-century, and subsequent generations of students were introduced to the Baconian plan by the very structure of the curriculum. Moreover, the limited scope of rhetoric implied by encyclopaedic interpretations of Bacon's taxonomy, furnished a conceptual refuse for the few remaining rhetorics of trope and figure.

Prominent examples include Nicholas Burton's Figurae Grammaticae et Rhetoricae (London, 1702), Thomas Gibbon's Rhetorici or, a View of its Principall Tropes and Figures (London, 1767), Daniel Turner's An Introduction to Rhetorici containing all the Tropes and Figures in English Verse (Abingdon, 1771), and Anthony Blackwall's An Introduction to the Classics (London, 175?). In spite of the popularity of the Baconian pattern, many theorists regarded purely stylistic ornamentation to be inappropriate. The seventeenth century had witnessed a sharp clash between the champions of ornate and simple styles. Early in the eighteenth century an anonymous author published an account

of the 'bloody civil war' between eloquence and bombast, and many authors in our period shared the unnamed author's preference for the simple, unornamented style advocated by Sprat, Boyle, Wooton, among others. While the Baconian conception thus appeared to restrict rhetoric to governing materials of questionable value, it opened two vistas to subsequent explorers. First, Bacon's concept of adornment meant more than simple verbal embellishment and his lists of colors, anthises, and formulae suggested ample means of presenting ideas 'to the imagination in lively representation.' [advancements II, xviii, 3] A theme which was prominent in the speculations of the period. Instance Fenelon's claim that the aim of discourse is to move an audience and that this end is best achieved by 'describing things and their surrounding features so that the listener sees them' [paraphrase, pp. 92-96] Subsequent applications of this concept include Campbell's emphasis on vivacity, although the term may have been borrowed from Hume,' and Beviulacqua has noted the general tendency of 'eighteenth century Scottish rhetoricians [to] acknowledge affective style and vivid imagery to be distinguishing characteristics of the art of rhetoric.' [Baconian influences essay] In its broadest application, this doctrine has been traced by Hauser who maintains that the emphasis on description is the distinctive characteristic of eighteenth-century rhetoric.

The second contribution of the Baconian scheme is expansion of the range of discourse to which rhetoric was thought relevant. While the Baconian scheme limited the contents of rhetoric by restricting the art to elocution--'the art of composition' in Beattie's phrase--it simultaneously broadened the application of the art by admitting nonpersuasive forms of discourse into the fold. Whereas the liberal arts pattern carefully limited rhetoric to persuasive discourse, the Baconian pattern considers rhetoric to be an art of composition which may be applied to to any purpose. Thus, for example, Campbell makes rhetoric a 'useful art' and expands its scope to include speeches desisned to inform, convince, please, move, and persuade. Significantly, such a taxonomy would not have occurred to an exponent of the liberal arts pattern--nor would attention to wit, humor, and ridicule as forms of discourse--because only persuasive discourse was subject to analysis.

3.0 FINE ARTS TRADITION

The final ordering of art which affected eighteenth century conceptions of rhetoric defined eloquence to be a fine art and sought to identify fundamental principles common to all of the fine arts. As a result, rhetoric was associated with a number of plastic arts such as painting, landscaping, and sculpture, and the contents of rhetoric were redefined in a manner consistent with this new

ordering.

Although this orientation came to dominate conceptions of rhetoric later in the eighteenth century, and I suspect it is largely responsible for the dissipation of rhetoric in the nineteenth century romantic movement, neither its origins nor its consequences are fully understood. Several treatises, primarily contintenental works, introduced the concept of fine arts at the conclusion of the seventeenth century. Charles Perrault's Le cabinet des beaus arts (1690) was among the most popular, and his list of fine arts includes eloquence, poetry, architecture, paintins, sculpture, optics, and mechanics. Subsequent treatises dropped optics and mechanics, and the corpus of fine arts was well established by the time Edmund Burke, Henry Home-Lord Kames, and Thomas Reid made it the foundation for their aesthetic theories.

In spite of its evident popularity, the philosophic basis for the union of such arts was not explained in terms satisfying to the bulk of the periods readers. Blair was the most able spokesman for a group of theorists who maintained the existence of a separate faculty of mind called "taste" to which all of these arts were said to appeal. Addison claimed that the faculty was activated by expression of novelty, grandeur, and beauty, and although his taxonomy was popular, its limitations were widely recognized. Thomas Reid, although his published statements

employ a formulation based on the theory of taste and its components articulated by Addison, adopted a substantially more sophisticated and interesting explanation in his unpublished lectures on the fine arts. Reid adopted the Cartesian distinction between mind and body as the ordering principle of his catalogue of knowledge, and classified all arts according to their application to either mind or body. To these two classes, however, he added a third based on interaction between mind and body and it is to this intermediate group that he gives the name "fine arts." Within this sphere, he included rhetoric. In Reid's view, the unifying feature of the fine arts is that they rely upon connections between mind and body to express mental phenomena such as sentiments and passions through material means. A final explanation of the union or the arts was offered by Kant at the close of the century. Kant maintained that the essential characteristic of beauty is the expression of a distinct type of idea--aesthetic ideas--and that the fine arts are united in the fact that all aim at such expression. Rhetoric, he said, is distinguished from the formative and sensitive arts by its reliance upon speech and words to express such ideas.

Although there was thus considerable variation in the reasons offered for uniting rhetoric with the fine arts, all agreed that the essential characteristic of the fine arts in general, and of rhetoric in particular, was the expression of ideas. The doctrine of expression surfaced in many

guises, but by mid-century it had been carefully formulated in the theory of natural signs. Berkeley had used the concept of natural signs to explain perception as the recognition that certain ideas were joined by nature and hence could be regarded as signs of one another. Reid found the doctrine, once shorn of its idealistic references, to be a convenient alternative to Hume's account of perception and Kame's use of the doctrine to account for the effects of the fine arts is virtually indistinguishable from Reid's. Both Reid and Kames were indebted to Thomas Nugent whose translation of DuBos' Critical Reflections on Poetry, Painting and Music (1748) had popularized both the phrase and the concept.

In practical treatises on rhetoric, the emphasis on expression gave rise to two somewhat divergent tendencies. First, increasing emphasis on expression is associated with declining interest in the instrumentality of rhetorical discourse. Signs of this decline include the broadening of rhetoric to encompass forms of discourse not previously regarded as rhetorical and the increasing interest of rhetoricians in criticism. In this regard, the belles Lettres may be seen as the application of rhetoric to judge the adequacy of expression in a variety of texts. The second tendency associated with emphasis on expression is the growth of interest in delivery and the perversely misnamed elocutionary movement. I do not mean to dispute the common view that the movement resulted from criticisms

of then widespread ineptitude, and Howell's observation that the elocutionists sought refuge in the last uncontested ground of classical rhetoric is consistent with my emphasis on the shifting boundaries of art. However, it should be noted that the elocutionists broadly subscribed to the view that the proper province of rhetoric is expression, and that movement, gesture, and facial expresssion are powerful means of expression. In addition, theorists who subscribed to Smith's theory of natural sentiments believed that the proper display of emotions is the best way to produce like emotions in the observers. Such display thereby favorably disposed the hearers to the speaker's cause while inconsistencies between the verbal and nonverbal messages caused suspension of belief and rejection of both the speaker and his cause.

4.0 CONCLUSION

My argument has been that the nature and content of eighteenth-century rhetorical theory was largely determined by generic taxonomies of art, and that the structure of these taxonomies often resulted from forces beyond the domain of individual arts. I realize that many of the works on which I have commented are more like trusted friends than new acquaintances, but I trust the novelty of the context has been sufficient to repay your attention.

From my thesis, I see two corrolaries: one purely historical and the other of more immediate concern. First, the historical. It has become popular to view rhetorical history as a series of successive systems and to characterize particular periods in terms of the dominant systems in each. Obviously, I am sympathetic to this view, but with the following reservation. The systems we manufacture as we review the accumulated materials are probably less meaningful than the systems recognized by the participants in the developmental process. For example, both Ehninger and Scott see the rhetoric of the eighteenth century as a single system marked by emphasis on analysis of psychological processes in an audience, and a managerial attitude toward discourse. Such characterization is an important vehicle of calling attention to the most novel rhetorics of the period, but it overlooks the historical dynamics of three rival systems contending for dominance. And, more importantly, it overlooks the extent to which the characteristics of individual rhetorics were determined by choices between the contending intellectual frames of reference.

The second corrolary to my thesis is that I think we now tend to disregard the implications of shifting taxonomies for the health of our discipline. In my relatively brief academic career, I have been associated with programs in Speech that were seen to be subordinate to colleges of Arts and Sciences, Humanities, and Visual and

Performing Arts. Many of my friends now teach in programs labelled 'behavioral science' or 'information studies,' and I have recently been asked to develop a 'communications module' in the School of Business and Management at the institution where I am employed. I mention these phenomena not as a form of protest, but rather to remind you that the forces beyond our discipline continue to exert formative influences. It would be incorrect to believe that these forces are improper, but we should note that each is based on an incomplete understanding of rhetoric and that in each case the partial understanding reflects the narrowly defined concerns of administrators outside our field. It seems to me that we may need to do more to take charge of our destiny, and to unify the diverse strands of interest in communication if rhetoric is to be a truly grand art of communication.